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California Adult Schools Unite to Survive Economic Crisis

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SANTA CLARA, Calif. - (Business Wire) Facing extreme budget cuts that could dismantle the state's school district adult education system, 340 California Adult Schools have joined to make their case for survival. The schools provide critical educational services to millions of California adults who do not have the required literacy, language, and workplace skills to succeed in the current economic environment. Key to the California Adult Schools' initiative is a new brand identity and a new public website at <http://californiaadultschools.org/>.

Funded through the state's K-12 districts, California Adult Schools fill a widening educational gap. With a commitment to community-based lifelong learning, they provide programming and services in the areas of job training, basic reading and math skills, high school diploma, GED, parenting, and English as a second language (ESL).

"California Adult Schools help adult students find jobs, earn degrees, and become better parents," said Roger Brossmer, Downey Adult School principal. "There are 5.3 million California adults without high school diplomas and 3 million English language learners who need access to adult education resources in order to work in the state economy."

A 2009 report commissioned by the California Department of Education (Source: WestEd Strategic Planning Needs Assessment, http://californiaadultschools.org/cas/attachments/119_ae0090_ref6049.pdf), says California Adult Schools are well positioned to address three driving forces in the state:

- The California economy is transitioning to one dominated by knowledge-based industries that require a workforce with specialized skills and advanced knowledge.
- The educational attainment of Californians is declining. (California performance numbers are generally below national averages, with more high school dropouts and lower rates of transition to college.)
- California's population is aging and becoming more diverse. (As the baby boomers retire much of the existing workforce's expertise will be replaced by a population increasingly characterized by low levels of education.)

"One in five Californians do not have a high school diploma or GED equivalent and 50 percent of those have less than a ninth-grade education. A state without adult schools will only accelerate those numbers," Brossmer said. "The social implications of a subsistence-level workforce are dire."

Adult education has been an important part of California's education system since the early years of statehood. The first adult school was sponsored by the San Francisco Board of Education in 1856. Adult education in California grew with the expanding population and was particularly responsive to the needs of immigrants. Through the years, California adult educators have provided nationwide leadership in the development of innovative instructional practices and creative educational solutions.

